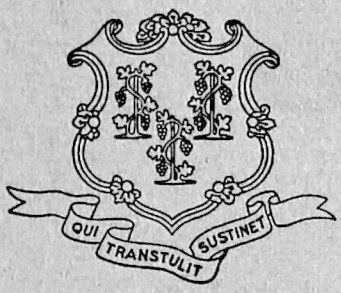
TERCENTENARY COMMISSION OF THE
STATE OF CONNECTICUT



COMMITTEE ON
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Slavery in Connecticut

RALPH FOSTER WELD

I

THERE is nothing remarkable in the fact that the English Puritans who founded Connecticut held Indians and negroes in bondage. In this respect, as in others, they accepted the standards of the age in which they lived. If biblical sanctions seemed to them more necessary than to other colonists, they found sufficient justification for slavery in Scripture. As the chosen people in a new Canaan it was easy for them to identify the Indians with the heathen whom the Hebrew law permitted to be enslaved; and that the negro was divinely ordained to be a servant was scarcely questioned. Moreover, the division of society into sharply differentiated classes was accepted by the settlers of Connecticut as belonging to the natural order of things. Such distinctions were a part of their heritage; they found them in the relation of man to God, subject to ruler, wife to husband, child to parent, and servant to master. Caste governed the allotment of seats in the meeting house. It was reflected in titles and modes of address. "Mister" was the mark of a gentleman and was jealously withheld from the "goodman." From the humble

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servant to the clergy and magistrates, the social order was marked by modes of address which indicated the degree of respect due the different divisions of society. Slavery as it developed in Connecticut in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, therefore, was a natural outcome of the heritage, customs, and religion of the people of the colony.

Indian slavery had its start after the Pequot War, when Massachusetts and the river colony divided prisoners. Subsequent troubles with the Indians, or threats of trouble, brought about arrangements, naturally enough entered into and obviously without the deliberate intent to engraft a new and unnatural labor system into the social fabric, which nevertheless had the effect of establishing slavery. In 1643, when danger threatened from the Narragansetts, the articles which formed the bond of union of the New England Confederation contained a provision for the equitable division of booty; that is, "lands, goods, or *persons*," in case of successful war. This arrangement clearly implied slavery as the natural lot of the captive. Provision for the rendition of fugitive "servants" was also made. In 1646, the Confederation authorized the seizure and enslavement of Indians from native villages giving sanctuary to fugitives "either to serve or to be shipped out and exchanged for negroes, as the cause will justly bear." This action of the Confederation was repeated in the Connecticut Code of 1650, and thus both Indian and negro slavery were sanctioned by the law of the colony. In 1650, the New Englanders, in their treaty with the neighboring Dutch, found it expedient to repeat the provisions of their Articles of Confederation in respect to fugitives.

Enslavement of Indian captives remained the accepted practice throughout the century. At the time of King

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Philip's War the general court authorized the transportation of fugitive Indian slaves, if retaken. In 1690, Connecticut made an agreement with Massachusetts, Plymouth, and New York to divide anticipated "plunder and *captives*" in the then expected war with the Indians.

Experience proved that Indians were not satisfactory slaves. They were not docile, and the record of laws and treaties for the recovery of runaways testifies to their restlessness. The time came, early in the eighteenth century, when Connecticut authorities found it necessary to take measures against their importation. Sullen Tuscarora captives, fresh from defeat in South Carolina, were being shipped out by that colony. The Connecticut general court took alarm and forbade the bringing in of Indians on penalty of the forfeiture of the slaves thus imported. A fifty-pound fine was prescribed to be exacted from the guilty shipmaster. This took place in 1715. It did not indicate moral condemnation of the slave trade, but rather a desire to keep uncontrollable and troublesome savages out of the colony.

The crushing of the Indian tribes of New England, the scattering and deportation of their remnants, and the suppression of the trade in Indian captives put a limit to the possible growth of Indian slavery. Thereafter it steadily decreased through death and emancipation. The custom of holding men in bondage in Connecticut would, therefore, have come to a natural end in the early years of the eighteenth century had it not been for the importation of negroes.

II

THERE are records which indicate the presence of negro slaves very early in the history of the colony, but throughout the seventeenth century their number was negligible.

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In the eighteenth century, there was a gradual increase until about 1750, and then a more rapid growth until the eve of the Revolution. According to a census taken in 1774 there were 191,392 whites, 5,085 negroes, and 1,363 Indians in Connecticut. Apparently, therefore, the slaves constituted between one fortieth and one thirtieth of the population. It is not likely that the slaves at any time seriously threatened the security of the poorer white element, and yet slavery must have worked somewhat to the disadvantage of that part of the population. From the outbreak of the War for Independence the number decreased.

This development in Connecticut during the first three quarters of the eighteenth century coincided with a corresponding growth of slavery throughout the British colonies, and may be traced to several circumstances. The British government had discovered an extraordinary source of commercial profit in the slave trade. Monopoly privileges had been granted to the Royal African Company in 1672, and by the Asiento of 1713 England obtained the exclusive right to carry negro slaves to Spanish America. In 1697, parliament passed an act permitting private merchants to engage in the trade, and by 1750 the final dissolution of the monopoly threw this lucrative commerce open to all adventurers. The result was an enormous increase in the number of slaves brought over annually after the middle of the eighteenth century.

Connecticut shipmasters took little active part in the direct African trade; nevertheless, they had a share in the traffic, carrying corn meal, staves, and horses to the West Indies, where they took on cargoes of slaves. Some of these cargoes were brought to Connecticut; but the Connecticut shipmaster of the period was primarily a coastal peddler, and so it is likely that he brought home, as a rule,

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only what he could not dispose of elsewhere. While half a dozen small ports in the colony sent vessels out to engage in coastal trade, commercial enterprise was relatively unimportant, and Connecticut remained throughout the colonial period a self-contained agricultural province. Massachusetts, and still more Rhode Island, engaged in the great three-cornered negro, molasses, and rum traffic which contributed so largely to New England's prosperity before the Revolution. Newport's commercial importance rested chiefly on the slave trade, and from that great market negroes were distributed throughout the North. It is, therefore, to the brisk commerce carried on by the neighboring colonies that the increase in Connecticut's slave population must be largely attributed.

Relatively unimportant as was its share in the total slave trade, Connecticut must yet bear its measure of responsibility. There were sea captains who engaged in it, slave dealers who bought and sold negroes, and public auction sales. Connecticut reproduced, on a small scale, the features of the system as found elsewhere.

So far as the relationship between master and slave was concerned, colonial Connecticut did not appear at a disadvantage, relatively speaking. In accordance with the precepts of the Mosaic code, slaves were usually considered as members of the household, in the relationship of children whom the master was required to care for and protect. Although servants for life, and willed to descendants as chattels, they yet possessed advantages and even such legal rights as were connected with property. Moral behavior, as befitted the servants of a God-fearing people, was encouraged. The responsibility for Christianizing them and for baptizing their infants and nurturing them in the fear of the Lord was seriously regarded. When asked to give advice on the subject of bringing up slaves

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as Christians, the general court solemnly affirmed such to be the master's duty. It seemed to pious masters an act of great virtue to take benighted heathen from the dark land of their birth, to transport them to a Christian land, and to convert them, thus ensuring their souls' salvation. Among such masters were counted many of the clergy, who were accustomed to own one or two slaves as house servants. It is evident that during the first half of the eighteenth century the rightfulness of slavery was scarcely questioned, but the responsibility of the master toward his servant was doubtless often pondered. Yet, slaves ran away from their masters and were advertised for in the newspapers. Not all masters were pious, nor were all slaves fond of their owners or content with their lot. Even in its gentlest form slavery invited callousness. For example, the good people of Torrington, as also those of other towns, admitted negro slaves to worship, but kept them safely out of sight of their white fellow Christians behind a high boarding in the gallery.

Although a master seldom owned more than two slaves, some few wealthy owners possessed a greater number; but there was never in Connecticut a labor system analogous to that of the Narragansett planters in Rhode Island. When Colonel Samuel Browne settled the present town of Salem about 1720, he was said to have brought in more than sixty families of slaves to clear and work the land, but this case was probably unique. Among the families possessing more than the average number of slaves may be mentioned the Wolcotts of Windsor. In 1761, Captain John Perkins of Norwich died in possession of fifteen negroes. Fowler, in his *Historical status of the negro in Connecticut*, cited as slave owners such clergymen as John Davenport of New Haven, Timothy Woodbridge of Hartford, Joseph Eliot of Guilford, Jared Eliot of Killing-

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worth, Nathaniel Chauncey of Durham, Noadiah Russell of Middletown, and William Worthington of Saybrook.

III

THE simple agricultural economy of Connecticut in the eighteenth century determined the character of slavery in the colony. In the nature of things the system was relatively mild. Slaves performed household tasks, or if they worked in the field they labored side by side with their masters. Timothy Dwight attempted a picture of slavery in Connecticut, in the vein of Goldsmith's *Deserted village*, in his poem *Greenfield Hill*, published in 1794. He contrasted the lot of the fortunate slave he knew, who whistled as he drove the "cumbrous wain," with the scourged and branded bondman of other regions. Dwight was a partial witness in all that concerned Connecticut, and no doubt the description may be criticized on the score of provincial complacency; yet he was no friend of slavery when he wrote thus of the Connecticut negro:

> . . . kindly fed, and clad, and treated, he
> Slides on, thro' life, with more than common glee.
> For here mild manners good to all impart,
> And stamp with infamy th' unfeeling heart;
> Here law, from vengeful rage, the slave defends,
> And here the gospel peace on earth extends.
>
> He toils, 'tis true; but shares his master's toil;
> With him, he feeds the herd, and trims the soil;
> Helps to sustain the house, with clothes, and food,
> And takes his portion of the common good.

Dwight did not let this idyllic picture of slavery in a favored land pass without giving the reader another aspect of the system. After all, the slave could not be truly virtuous, for moral choices were denied him:

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. . . shut from honour's paths he turns to shame,
And filches the small good, he cannot claim.
To sour, and stupid, sinks his active mind;
Finds joys in drink, he cannot elsewhere find;
Rule disobeys; of half his labor cheats;
In some safe cot, the pilfer'd turkey eats;
Rides hard, by night, the steed, his art purloins;
Serene from conscience' bar himself essoins;
Sees from himself his sole redress must flow,
And makes revenge the balsam of his woe.

In endeavoring to understand the status of the slave in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it must be remembered that white men, as well as Indians and Africans, were obliged to submit to enforced labor. The Connecticut law provided that debtors without estate should "satisfy the debt by service"; and similar treatment was accorded idlers, to pay costs of prosecution. Slaves, like indentured servants, possessed the privilege of suing masters for unjust treatment. The law protected their right to life and property. They were servants for life, not for a period of years; yet the Connecticut slaves were not helpless chattels of masters invested with absolute power. Their status was not unlike that of indentured servants except for the duration of the service, which made of the indentured servant a prospective freeman and master, and left the slave a bondman forever.

A vivid picture of the state of slavery at the very beginning of the eighteenth century is given in the diary of Madam Sarah Kemble Knight, a keen and observant Boston woman, who journeyed through Connecticut in the winter of 1704–1705. She wrote:

There are great plenty of oysters all along the sea side as farr as I Rode in the Collony and those verry good. And they Generally lived very well and comfortably in their families. But too Indulgent (especially ye farmers) to their Slaves, suffering

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too great familiarity from them, permitting ym to sit at Table and eat with them (as they say to save time) and into the dish goes the black hoof as freely as the white hand. They told me that there was a farmer lived near the Town where I lodged who had some difference with his slave concerning something the Master had promised him and did not punctually perform: wch caused some hard words between them; But at length they put the matter to arbitration and Bound themselves to stand to the award as such as they named—wch done, the Arbitrators Having heard the Allegations of both parties order the master to pay 40s to black face, and acknowledge his fault, and so the matter ended; the poor master very honestly standing to the award.

Connecticut's black code was begun in 1690 by the passage of acts directed against the wandering of slaves outside the towns to which they belonged. Slaves so wandering without a pass from their owners or from someone in authority were deemed runaways, and might be seized and brought back to their masters. Even a free negro without identification could be taken before a magistrate, and was obliged to pay the costs of the action. In 1703, innkeepers were forbidden to serve intoxicants to slaves without the special permission of their masters. This prohibition, however, extended to sons, apprentices, and servants as well as to slaves. A law of 1708 dealt with theft. Those obtaining purloined property from slaves must return the property plus double its value, failing which they must undergo the lash; and the slaves caught in theft were to be given "not exceeding Thirty Stripes." Whipping was also prescribed for negroes who were turbulent and quarrelsome in public. As the number of slaves increased the code became more repressive. In 1723 ten stripes were prescribed for a slave out-of-doors after nine in the evening without an order from his master; and in 1730 it was provided that a slave, guilty of using

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language that would be actionable if used by a freeman, should be whipped and sold to defray the costs, if they were not paid by the master.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century problems of emancipation began to concern the lawmakers, as is evidenced by the action of the legislature in providing that former owners must be responsible for the maintenance of freed slaves who should be in want. This responsibility was made more definite in 1711, when the selectmen were required to care for such emancipated slaves in case the masters failed to do so, and then to bring suit against the former owners to recoup the loss sustained by the town. These laws indicate a determination on the part of the authorities to prevent manumission being used as a means of avoiding responsibility for slaves who had outlived their usefulness, rather than any special tenderness for the emancipated slaves. It should be noted, however, that there were mitigating features to be found in the code even in its harshest period. For instance, slaves were permitted to offer evidence and to make pleas in their own defense. The code was virtually complete by 1730.

It is apparent that slavery was entrenched and protected in the eighteenth century, upheld by law and sanctioned by public opinion. Yet there were a few voices raised against it. Among the Puritans of New England Judge Samuel Sewall of Massachusetts was almost alone in his generation; but the Quaker conscience was deeply and permanently stirred, and the Friends, in Rhode Island as well as in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, bore an increasingly determined and effective witness against the system. Elihu Coleman, a Nantucket Quaker, published an anti-slavery tract in 1737. By 1758, the opposition of this sect reached the point of forbidding its members to purchase slaves or to engage in the trade, and at the outbreak of

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the Revolution slave ownership among them was prohibited. The enlightened and humane Quaker viewpoint was best expressed in the writings of John Woolman, who demonstrated the anti-Christian character of the system in words devoid of bitterness and censoriousness. Woolman preached against slavery in Rhode Island in the middle of the century; and the Quakers of that colony started a campaign against the trade and in behalf of abolition in 1774. This religious sect was thus the first in New England to take organized action as a body of Christians. The Quaker agitation touched Connecticut only indirectly, but in time its influence was to be felt.

IV

Less sensitive to humanitarian promptings, the Puritan conscience did not awaken until the Revolutionary period; but, when opposition to British measures led to the proclamation of John Locke's theories of natural right by great popular leaders such as James Otis, and when these theories were reiterated from the pulpits of New England and scattered widely in pamphlet form, searchings of the heart respecting the righteousness of slavery naturally followed. The more sensitive and intelligent of the clergy could not insist on the right of man to freedom, and at the same time condone slavery; and the fresh Revolutionary breeze swept from the minds of such men as Ezra Stiles the notion that enslavement of the erstwhile heathen was a blessing in disguise. Appeals for emancipation began to be made in the pulpit and in the press.

Theory was reinforced, it must be admitted, by conditions. It had begun to be realized that slaves were unprofitable and a threat to free white labor. The awakening to this economic truth was not peculiar to Connecticut; the failure of the system was widely recognized except in

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the far Southern colonies, where it seemed necessary to existence. Moreover, the slave trade had been pursued so zealously that the market was glutted; but it was still one of the favored interests of mercantilism, and colonial protests brought forth the assertion of the Earl of Dartmouth, secretary of state for the colonies, that "we cannot allow the colonies . . . to discourage . . . a trade so beneficial to the nation."

Enlightened self-interest, then, led many of the colonies to ban the slave trade when the Revolutionary movement reached the point of economic warfare, as well as to join in the non-importation agreement of the First Continental Congress respecting slavery. The leading colony in this movement in congress was not one of the New England group. It was Virginia, where Revolutionary doctrine flourished, and where the unprofitableness of slavery was widely recognized. Connecticut did not take an advanced position, but was simply in line with colonial sentiment when its legislature passed the act of October, 1774, providing that:

> no Indian, Negro, or Molatto Slave, shall, at any Time hereafter be brought or imported into this Colony, by Sea or Land, from any Place or places whatsoever, to be disposed of, left, or sold within this Colony.

A fine of one hundred pounds per slave was laid for violation of this act. In the same year Virginia and North Carolina were declaring against the importation of slaves from Africa, the West Indies, or any other part of the world, and by 1778 the trade was under the ban of the law throughout the Middle and Eastern states.

The action of Connecticut in ending the slave trade, like that of the other colonies and of congress, was obviously a product of several motives, among which a

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newly-developed humanitarian idealism, a recognition of the unprofitableness of the system, and the desire to coerce the mother country may be discerned.

The scarcity of slaves in the far South caused a renewal of the traffic after the war, but the New England states passed new laws forbidding their citizens to engage in the trade, and providing for the ending of slavery in their territories. The Connecticut laws of 1784 and 1788 registered the state's determination to hasten a process which had already set in. The provision of the act of 1784, which stands as the high-water mark of Connecticut's anti-slavery legislation in the eighteenth century, was as follows:

Whereas sound policy requires that abolition of slavery should be effected as soon as may be, consistant with the right of individuals, and the public safety and welfare. Therefore, *Be it enacted,* That no negro or molatto child, that shall after the first day of March, *one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four,* be born within this State, shall be held in servitude, longer than until they arrive to the age of twenty-five years, notwithstanding the mother or parent of such child was held in servitude at the time of its birth; but such child, at the age aforesaid, shall be free: any law, usage, or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.

In 1797, the age of manumission was placed at twenty-one instead of twenty-five. Thus did Connecticut, in its characteristic manner, seek to wipe the stain of slavery from its soil, and at the same time to avoid confiscation of property. Gradual rather than complete emancipation seemed a safe and sane policy, and was certainly in keeping with the conservative temper so noticeable throughout the state's history.

Emancipation had been greatly accelerated by the war through the use of slaves as substitutes for white men in the Continental army. This was not only authorized by

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the general assembly in 1777, but masters were released from liability for the support of slaves freed because of military service. There was a negro company of the Connecticut Line commanded by David Humphreys.

By this time there was little or no likelihood that slavery could have survived in Connecticut, or elsewhere in the North, in any case; but there was danger of the continuance of the sea-borne slave traffic. For many years after this period, New Englanders openly or surreptitiously engaged in the trade. The Rhode Island Quakers were leaders in the fight against it. They worked for a prohibitory law in their own state, and after its enactment were influential in securing the passage of the act of 1788 in Connecticut. This law provided a fine of fifty pounds for each African taken on board a vessel by a Connecticut citizen, and a penalty of five hundred pounds for every vessel engaged in the trade. It also exacted one hundred pounds for forcibly removing a free negro, mulatto, or Indian from the state.

From the time of the passage of these acts, it was recognized that whatever there was left of slavery in Connecticut remained as the vestige of a discredited system. The actual number of slaves in the state had steadily decreased since 1774. Half of the negro population had become free: the first United States census in 1790 recorded 2,759 slaves and 2,801 free negroes in Connecticut.

V

It was natural that the people of Connecticut should assume that what had happened in their state was likely to happen elsewhere, and that it was therefore mischievous to put undue pressure on states where slavery was more deeply intrenched. It might well seem the part of wisdom, in view of the experience of the Middle and Eastern

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states, to give each of the remaining slave states ample time to rid itself of the system in its own way.

This appeared to be the view of the matter that influenced the Connecticut representatives, Roger Sherman, Oliver Ellsworth, and William Samuel Johnson, in the Federal Convention of 1787. When the proposal to tax the importation of slaves, in order to discourage the traffic, was pressed by Luther Martin of Maryland and supported by George Mason of Virginia and John Dickinson of Delaware, who all denounced slavery in the strongest terms, the Connecticut delegates were conciliatory. They wished to appease the representatives from Georgia and South Carolina, who defended slavery and the slave trade with vigor. Sherman had no thought of approving the traffic when he asserted that "it was better to let the Southern States import slaves than to part with those States." He merely expressed an opinion, which must have been widely shared in Connecticut, that slavery was an evil bound to disappear, but which must be endured for a time for the sake of a more effective federal union. Ellsworth emphasized the same point of view in declaring that the "morality and wisdom" of slavery are matters for the states to decide for themselves. Ellsworth, in his desire to compromise, almost went out of his way to support the Southern view. This accommodating spirit of compromise, the level-headed, middle-of-the-road view, the spirit that refuses to become excited over abstract principle, but takes advantage of what seems to be the common-sense realities of the situation, found expression in Sherman's observation "that the abolition of slavery seemed to be going on in the United States, and that the good sense of the several states would probably by degrees complete it." Connecticut was represented on the committee which compromised the matter by William Samuel

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Johnson. Luther Martin, also a member of that committee, wrote this significant passage: "I found the *Eastern* States, notwithstanding their *aversion to slavery*, were very willing to indulge the Southern States at least with a temporary liberty to prosecute the slave trade, provided the Southern States would, in their turn, gratify *them*, by laying no restriction on navigation acts. . ." The compromise guaranteed the preservation of the trade until 1808, but permitted a tax not to exceed ten dollars for each slave imported.

In view of later events, the moderate position taken by the Connecticut delegates may seem to indicate a lack of statesmanlike prescience. Viewing the situation as it appeared at the time to these men, however, there is much to be said for their judgment. They were anxious to cement the Union. Slavery was condemned from all quarters except from the far South. No one at that time could foresee the cotton kingdom of the next century. Moderate men might indeed be excused for deprecating agitation which might endanger the Union at its birth, and for looking forward hopefully to the gradual end of the evil. That there was in the attitude of the Connecticut representatives, however, a certain lack of idealism and a certain spirit of canny Yankee bargaining, it would be idle to deny. At any rate, the view of Connecticut was the view of the convention, for it was the one that prevailed.

As it happened, Georgia and South Carolina, both, within the decade following the adoption of the Constitution, passed laws forbidding the importation of slaves. The wave of terror that spread through the slave states at the news of the Haitian uprising and massacre contributed to this action. The demand for slaves again proved irresistible, however, and South Carolina legalized the African trade in 1803. During the early years under the Constitu-

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tion all the states strengthened their laws against importation. In 1792, Connecticut amended the act of 1788. This new act dealt in detail with the transportation of slaves from the state for sale outside the state, and also specifically forbade the importation and sale of Indians.

VI

MANY influences combine to make up public opinion, and no picture of the state in the 1790's would be complete without a reference to the bold and earnest group of early abolitionists that bore an honorable part in laying the foundations of antislavery sentiment. This organized movement, flaring for a few years and then subsiding, must be viewed against the background of the natural social conservatism of the mass of the citizenry. New England Puritans now joined hands with the Quakers, bringing to the cause the denunciatory zeal of converts. Jonathan Edwards, Jr., then pastor of a New Haven church, undoubtedly had in mind the slave owners of his own state as well as those of other states when he spoke these words before the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society in 1791, in as bold tones as Garrison's forty years later: "To hold a man in a state of slavery who has a right to his liberty, is to be every day guilty of robbing him of his liberty, or of man-stealing, and is a greater sin in the sight of God than concubinage or fornication." The Connecticut Society was established in 1790. It sent representatives to the antislavery conventions which met at Philadelphia in 1794 and 1795. In the latter year Edwards prepared the convention's address to South Carolina, reminding the people of that state of the "numerous class of men, existing among you, deprived of their natural rights and forcibly held in bondage," imploring the state to better their lot, and pointing out the debasing effect of the slave

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trade on "our citizens," who have become accustomed to contemplate "these people only through the medium of avarice or prejudice."

Prominent in the society's membership were President Ezra Stiles of Yale College, who was its president, Uriah Tracy, twice a delegate to the Philadelphia antislavery conventions, Simeon Baldwin, Theodore Dwight, Chauncey Goodrich, and Ezekiel Williams. One of its first acts was to send a petition to congress which condemned the "whole system of African slavery" in the name of a "large majority of the citizens" of the state, and prayed congress to "prevent, as much as possible, the horrors of the slave-trade, . . . prohibit the citizens of the United States from carrying on the trade, . . . prohibit foreigners from fitting out vessels . . . in the United States for transporting persons from Africa, . . . and alleviate the sufferings of those who are now in slavery, and check the further progress of this inhuman commerce." In 1794 Theodore Dwight delivered an address before the Society at Hartford, which was later published. But neither bold addresses nor earnest petitions deeply affected public opinion at the time. They doubtless contributed to the legal ending of the slave trade, but the theoretical attachment to human rights which the haranguing and pamphleteering of the Revolutionary period had engendered found faint expression during the first third of the nineteenth century. The organized antislavery movement faded out into a quieter and less disturbing manifestation —the colonization movement—which found support in quarters immune to radical antislavery sentiment.

VII

Zeal for natural right was supplanted in this period by other enthusiasms. The rise of the cotton kingdom, the

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growing spirit of nationalism after the War of 1812, and the tremendous geographical and economic expansion of the country contributed to an attitude of tolerance toward slavery. The slave trade became very active between 1820 and 1850, and there is little doubt that Connecticut shipmasters violated the laws of both state and nation in order to share in its gains. Such traders were regarded with aversion, and their activities were discussed in whispers; but the right of the Southern states to conduct their domestic concerns as they saw fit was openly defended by many of the solid citizens of Connecticut. Yet it must be remembered that the excitement over Missouri indicated that the people of Connecticut were deeply concerned lest slavery should spread beyond the borders of the Southern states. Like other Northerners, they could view its presence there with some complacency; but they could not tolerate its spread.

The project of the American Colonization Society to transport free negroes to Africa seemed to many well-intentioned people the most hopeful path to the eventual solution of the problem throughout the nation. It did not assail the motives of slave owners, and it conveyed the impression that the negro was being helped. Religious leaders opposed schemes for negro education on the ground that they would interfere with colonization. Education implied eventual equality, whereas colonization seemed to point toward a future when the country would be entirely rid of the race problem. This state of mind contributed a moral sanction to the determined opposition which met proposals to establish in the state schools for negroes.

Such an institution was projected by a convention of free negroes at Philadelphia in 1831. New Haven seemed to these negroes an ideal community for this enterprise.

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The inhabitants of that city thought otherwise, and at the mayor's call met and resolved "that we will resist the establishment of the proposed college by every lawful means," registering themselves as opposed to meddling in the affairs of other states through encouraging emancipation or negro education. It is possible that the scheme would never have materialized in any case, but the action taken by the citizens of New Haven was sufficient to discourage it.

VIII

ANOTHER educational venture which would seem at this distance to be very harmless soon had the whole state by the ears. This affair marked the emergence of the great abolition movement, which was destined to disturb the current of the state's life and thought for many years. The precipitating agency was the Quaker conscience. Operating in a Puritan community it produced a reaction of surprising violence. In this episode, as in the case of the opposition to the New Haven school, the action of some, at least, of the citizens concerned seems to have been predicated upon the belief that the seminary would injure the colonization movement.

Prudence Crandall, a Quakeress, conducted a girls' boarding school at Canterbury. She received into her establishment a colored girl who belonged to the local church and who had attended the district school. Although the girl was a "day scholar" only, this innovation was deeply resented, probably because it carried with it an implication of racial equality. Miss Crandall had been reading Garrison's *Liberator*, and determined to challenge the community's prejudice in a radical way. Encouraged by abolitionist leaders, she opened a school for colored girls only, and brought down upon herself the angry con-

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demnation of the town meeting. A committee was appointed to bring her to a more reasonable frame of mind. One of the leaders in this proceeding was Andrew T. Judson, who was shortly afterwards appointed United States district judge. The intrepid young woman was not to be deterred by a resolution, and went ahead with her project. In the spring of 1833, she received colored pupils from the neighboring states, ten to twenty in all; and the outraged community felt obliged to take counsel as to the measures necessary to remove the offensive institution from the village green.

A second town meeting condemned the school as a "rendezvous . . . designed by its projectors . . . to promulgate their disgusting doctrines of amalgamation and their pernicious sentiments of subverting the Union." A petition to the general assembly was drawn up "deprecating the evil consequences of bringing from other states and towns, people of color for any purpose, and more especially for the purpose of disseminating the principles and doctrines opposed to the benevolent colonizing system." The petition found support in other towns, and the legislature was induced to enact a statute designed to outlaw Miss Crandall's school. She defied the unjust law as calmly as she had defied the resolution of the town meeting. The next step for the aroused town authorities was an appeal to the courts. In June, 1833, Miss Crandall was arrested.

Throughout the affair she was advised by officers of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Samuel J. May, a clergyman who in this same year helped to organize both the New Haven and the American antislavery societies, was pastor of the Unitarian church in the neighboring town of Brooklyn. He counseled the young woman in every step she took. Financial aid for her defense in the

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courts was obtained from Arthur Tappan, an abolitionist merchant of New York City, who also provided funds to establish a paper to exploit the case in the interest of "the cause of the whole oppressed race." This paper, the *Unionist*, was edited by Charles C. Burleigh of Plainfield.

The case was shrewdly exploited by the abolitionists for the furtherance of their cause. Their tactical skill appeared in their decision to decline to furnish bail. This threw on the prosecution the responsibility for lodging Miss Crandall in a cell that had been occupied by felons. Since her offense was the possession of an unusually sensitive conscience and the courage to obey its dictates, in the long run, public sympathy was bound to be touched. After one night of imprisonment, bail bonds were produced; but one night was amply sufficient for the desired effect, and the picture of a young Quakeress in a cell must have been worth more to the abolitionist cause than many pages of argument.

The case was carried through the courts of the state. Miss Crandall's lawyers fought the constitutionality of the law. Finally, a year after her arrest, after one jury had disagreed and another had brought in a verdict against her, the supreme court of errors decided in her favor on the ground of "insufficiency of evidence," avoiding the question of constitutionality. The state's sober second thought is revealed in the repeal of the law within five years.

After failure in the courts, the exasperated citizens of Canterbury resorted to violence. In September, a night attack on her house rendered it uninhabitable, and Miss Crandall at last gave way. May, writing of the final event in his *Memoirs*, said: "I felt ashamed of Connecticut, ashamed of my State, ashamed of my country, ashamed of my color."

Whatever may have been the feeling of individual

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citizens, the town of Canterbury was not ashamed, if its official record may be believed. It put a period to the episode by resolving "that the Government of the United States, the nation with all its institutions, of right belong to the white man, who now possess them; . . . that our appeal to the Legislature of our own State, in a case of such peculiar mischief, was not only due to ourselves, but to the obligations devolving upon us under the Constitution. To have been silent would have been participating in the wrongs intended. . . . We rejoice that the appeal was not in vain."

IX

In the Crandall case, abolitionists contended against advocates of colonization and against others who were moved by a spirit of social conservatism or by racial prejudice. This case furnished the antislavery group with a convenient springboard to launch their agitation in the state. It was natural that many sober-minded people looked upon them as trouble makers. A New Haven town meeting in the year 1835, which was dignified by the presence of Noah Webster as one of its officers, indicated the attitude of the average solid citizen. Responding to resolutions from Charleston, South Carolina, which condemned abolitionist propaganda, this gathering heartily seconded the Charleston resolutions and quoted with approval a report rendered by a congressional committee forty-five years before, to the effect that congress had no power to interfere with slavery in the states. This conservative body also quoted from an old letter written by Oliver Wolcott. "I wish," Wolcott had written, "that Congress would prefer the white people of this country to the black. After they have taken care of the former, they may amuse themselves with the other people." Coloniza-

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tion was commended by the same gathering in another resolution.

During the same year a meeting at Hartford condemned the abolitionist literature as "inflammatory" and a danger to the "confederacy." In Middletown, Willbur Fisk, Wesleyan's first president, shared this opinion. He favored "freedom to the slave," but the methods of the "ultra-abolitionists" were offensive to him. The general annoyance which the agitators caused at the time brought rebuke upon them from the Norwich town meeting, which denied them the use of the town hall, and from the ministers of Litchfield county, who denounced the Quakeress, Abby Kelley, then drawing people to the antislavery cause in that part of the state, as "that woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess to teach and seduce my servants."

The movement spread, however, in the years following the Crandall case, and with it discussion that rose to violent pitch, followed at times by actions which suited the words. It differed from the antislavery movement of the 1790's in its insistence on immediate and absolute abolition of slavery. In Guilford the church split over the issue. The Farmington church was torn by dissension. The Litchfield County Anti-Slavery Society was greeted by mob violence when the first attempt to organize was made, but prospered and became a vigorous propagandizing agency in spite of all opposition. In 1836 the state organization launched an organ, the *Christian freeman.* By that year the movement had attained sufficient vigor to issue many pamphlets on slavery.

It is apparent that sentiment in Connecticut during the first third of the nineteenth century was in general opposed to agitating the slavery issue; it was not favorable to the establishment of negro schools; but it was in

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sympathy with non-contentious expressions of good-will toward the negro, such as the colonization idea. At the same time, the people of the state had no wish to perpetuate the system within their borders. This is shown in a clear light in the disposition of cases involving negroes that came before the courts.

Again and again, from the Revolution until the legal end of slavery in the state, the Connecticut judiciary by its decisions indicated its repugnance toward the system. The judges were inclined to interpret the law liberally, and preferred to give freedom the benefit of the doubt. When a certain master claimed a slave who had served with the owner's consent through the Revolution, the court held that service in the Continental army amounted to manumission. In another case, a negro was declared free on the basis of a mere verbal promise of his mistress, given years before, in spite of the fact that he had subsequently been sold. Timothy Caesar, owned by a citizen of Mansfield, was declared not a slave on the ground that his mother, an Indian, was a free woman. A case decided in 1817 had an important bearing on the law of 1784.[1] At the age of twenty-five, Fanny Libbett had been given her freedom under the terms of that law. The town of Windsor later sued the town of Hartford for her support. In its decision the court held that she had never been a slave, but that her status had been that of an apprentice, as she was born after the passage of the act. Another support case, in 1839, brought out the declaration that an emancipated slave was "entitled to all the rights . . . of other free citizens," including the important right to acquire "a new place of settlement."

One of the most significant cases involving the law of

[1] It is not clear why this action was based on the law of 1784, rather than on the law of 1797 which had amended it. See p. 13, above.

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slavery was that of Nancy Jackson vs. Bulloch. The decision, which was a close one, was rendered by the state supreme court in 1837. Suit was brought in behalf of a slave born in Georgia against her owner, J. S. Bulloch of that state, who had taken up a temporary residence in Hartford for the sake of his children's schooling. Bulloch spent the winter months in Georgia, leaving Nancy in Hartford with his family. The court declared her free, giving her the benefit of every doubtful point in the law. It was contended that the statutes of 1774 and 1784 "were designed to terminate slavery in Connecticut. . . . The former was intended to weaken the system; the latter to destroy it." The act of 1774 had provided that no slave could be "left" in the state. Bulloch's winter residence in Georgia gave the court an opportunity to apply the term "left" to Nancy. As for the law of 1784,[2] with its provision that all slaves "born within the State" should be free at twenty-five years of age, it was held that citizens of other states could not claim privileges denied citizens of Connecticut. The court not only bent the law to serve the purposes of freedom; it took high ground against slavery as a system and asserted natural human right, declaring "that every human being has a right to liberty, as well as to life and property, and to enjoy the fruit of his own labor; that slavery is contrary to the principles of natural right and to the great law of love; that it is founded on injustice and fraud and can be supported only by the provisions of positive law." With this noble and sweeping declaration of the state's highest court slavery all but came to an end in Connecticut.

[2] See footnote 1.

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THIS important case was soon followed by a strange and thrilling episode which engaged the sympathies of many people of the state in behalf of a band of captive negroes. In the spring of 1839, a slaver, the *Amistad*, took a cargo of slaves from Africa to Havana, in violation of the Spanish law. There, more than two score were bought by two Cubans, who re-embarked on the *Amistad* with them, and sailed for Puerto Principe. Among the captives was an organizing genius whom we know as Joseph Cinquez. Under his leadership, the Africans took over the ship, killed the captain, and forced the two Cubans to navigate the vessel for them, proposing to sail back to Africa. The two white men steered eastward by day, and by night brought the ship back toward the American coast. After weeks of this sort of thing, the ship anchored off the eastern end of Long Island. A United States brig took charge of the vessel, and conveyed it to New London, where a hearing was conducted on board the ship before United States District Judge Andrew T. Judson, who had figured prominently in the prosecution of Prudence Crandall. This occurred in the latter part of August, 1839. The negroes were taken to New Haven and there lodged in jail. Claims and counterclaims for the vessel and its cargo were made. Both the Spanish minister and the American state department seemed more bent on delivering the Africans up to the vengeance of the Cuban courts than on inquiring into the legality of their status.

The cause of the negroes was taken up by a group of antislavery men in New York, who employed counsel and prepared to fight the case through to a finish. The following January, Judge Judson, presiding over the district court at New Haven, declared that the point that

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the negroes were not subjects of Spain but native Africans was clearly proved, and that they should be transported to Africa. Forsyth, Van Buren's secretary of state, eager to please the proslavery interest, ordered the district attorney to appeal the case. Justice Thompson, presiding over the circuit court, affirmed the decision, leaving the final disposition of the prisoners to the supreme court of the United States.

John Quincy Adams was now brought into the case. In November, 1840, he went to New Haven, made the acquaintance of the prisoners, and conferred with their attorney, Roger Sherman Baldwin, later governor of the state. His sympathies were thoroughly aroused by their predicament, and he devoted himself to their cause without reservation.

A few years before, the people of a small Connecticut community had roused themselves to frenzy because of the presence of a few unwanted negro girls from neighboring states. The plight of the *Amistad* captives evoked emotions of quite another sort. They were visited, fed, and clothed. They were given instruction in English and taught to read and write. The opportunity for Christianization was utilized so effectively that from this band of negroes there later developed a Christian mission in their native district. The very ringleader of the prosecution of Prudence Crandall, Judge Judson, declared that they were free men and should be returned to Africa.

When the case was heard before the supreme court in February, 1841, John Quincy Adams and Roger Sherman Baldwin appeared in the prisoners' behalf. The two counselors felt that they were pitting themselves against great odds. According to Adams, "an immense array of power—the Executive Administration, instigated by the minister of a foreign nation, has been brought to bear in

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this case on the side of injustice." Justice, supported by undeniable facts and able reasoning, was of weight in the federal courts if not in the executive department. The opinion of the court, pronounced by Justice Story, affirmed the decision of the circuit court except that part of it which delivered the negroes to the custody of the president to be transported to Africa. They were declared free unconditionally, were taken by their friends to Farmington, Connecticut, and in November they sailed for Africa.

XI

From this time until the Civil War, antislavery sentiment mounted in the state, and at each succeeding crisis Connecticut took a more advanced position in behalf of freedom. The general assembly, in resolutions adopted in 1838, took its stand for the right of petition, then denied by the slave power in congress, and against the slave trade in the District of Columbia and the annexation of Texas. Moreover, the state, by this time, was so thoroughly opposed in sentiment to the pretensions of the Southern states that, at the same session of the legislature, an act obstructing the operation of the United States fugitive slave law of 1793 was passed. This law gave the accused negro the right of trial by jury, and obliged the claimant to pay costs and damages in case of failure to prove his claim. During the 1840's, the antislavery vote steadily mounted from less than two hundred for Birney in 1840 to five thousand for Van Buren in 1848. In 1844, the general assembly put another obstacle in the way of slave owners seeking their property in Connecticut by passing an act forbidding judges or other officers of the state to issue warrants for the arrest or detention of fugitives.

The formal end of slavery in Connecticut, strangely enough, was not consummated until 1848. In that year

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the legislature passed the final act against the system, providing that no person should thereafter be held in slavery in the state, and that no slave might be brought into Connecticut. At this time the number of slaves had dwindled to a dozen or so elderly negroes, and the act humanely protected these helpless people by providing that emancipated slaves must be supported by their masters. It is obvious that this law was not essential to the extinction of slavery in the state, but Connecticut, having now removed the evil forever from its own jurisdiction, could more consistently oppose acts of the Federal Government and of other states offensive to the sentiment of its people.

In the 1850's, sentiment turned more and more decisively to the antislavery side. In 1854, the anti-Nebraska candidate for governor received nearly twenty thousand votes. Two years later, Frémont captured the state, which was also to give its vote to Lincoln in 1860. The federal fugitive slave act of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska act of 1854 had borne fruit in a new political alignment in Connecticut, as elsewhere in the North. Like other Northern states, Connecticut gave emphatic utterance to its conviction in its "personal liberty" act of 1854. There were still conservatives, such as the Reverend Nathaniel W. Taylor, who urged patience and sought to present the Southern point of view in a favorable light; but the state was now committed to a definitely antislavery bias and sympathized with the declaration of John Boyd, that "desperate diseases require desperate remedies." The act was, in fact, a bold defiance of the Federal Government, and although defended by David C. Sanford and William T. Minor[3] as constitutional, it effectually nullified the

[3] Boyd was president *pro tempore* of the state senate; Sanford and Minor were state senators; Sanford was soon chosen judge of the superior court, and Minor was shortly elected governor.

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fugitive slave law by providing a five-thousand-dollar fine and five years imprisonment for falsely representing a free person to be a slave and by requiring the testimony of two credible witnesses, or its equivalent, to prove a claim to a negro.

The final act passed by the legislature on the subject of slavery was directed against the Dred Scott decision. This law, adopted in 1857, declared that any slave not a fugitive from another state, "coming into this State, or being therein, shall forthwith become and be free." Henceforth the views and actions of Connecticut with reference to slavery were no longer concerns of state interest, but became completely absorbed in national issues and federal policy.

In the course of a century a complete revolution had occurred in the sentiment of the people of Connecticut. An atmosphere tolerant of slavery had by degrees been changed to an atmosphere wholly intolerant of the system. Its economic unprofitableness, the liberal philosophy of the Revolutionary period, and the growth of humanitarian idealism contributed to the change; but these factors alone cannot be held wholly accountable. The western world as a whole had advanced in its thinking in regard to slavery, and Connecticut moved with the general progress of civilization. It is to the credit of the state that even at the height of slavery, at a time when common opinion sanctioned it, the system as it existed in Connecticut took a mild form, that slaves were protected by the law, and that masters were conscientiously concerned respecting the welfare of their bondmen.

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Bibliographical Note

THIS brief account of slavery in Connecticut is based chiefly on two works: Bernard C. Steiner, *History of slavery in Connecticut* (Johns Hopkins University studies, vol. 11, pp. 371–454, Baltimore, 1893); and William C. Fowler, *The historical status of the negro in Connecticut* ([Dawson's] *Historical magazine*, third series, vol. 3, January, 1874–April, 1875, later reprinted). Mention should be made also of Lorenzo J. Greene, "Slave-holding New England and its awakening" (*Journal of negro history*, vol. 13, pp. 492–533, October, 1928); and of William E. B. Du Bois, *Suppression of the African slave-trade to the United States of America*, 1638–1870 (Harvard historical studies, vol. 1, New York, 1896).

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